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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by International Council of Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.



Statement

Trafficking has a substantial history, and its beginnings can be traced to the system of slavery which was endemic to various cultures and societies throughout the world. It is a practice which is still well and alive, and with the vast improvements in technology and increasingly fluid movement of human resources, goods and services across borders, traffickers are finding it faster and easier to ply their trade.

Trafficking is essentially based on poverty and exploitation, and traffickers focus on the most vulnerable groups in society. Needless to say, women and children are the primary targets. Children are trafficked for a multitude of reasons: for recruitment as child soldiers, as lowly or unpaid labour or as sex workers, or to have their organs harvested. Gender inequalities only aggravate the situation for the girl child, who can be subject to a child marriage, female genital mutilation and sexual violence. The high demand of the sex industry for the girl child only bodes ill for her, and UNICEF reports that among the high numbers of children trafficked in West and Central Africa (mainly for domestic work), nearly 90% of them are girls.ⁱ Further away in Asia, girls as young as 13 years of age find themselves trafficked as 'mail-order brides'.ⁱⁱ While Asia and Africa have been acknowledged as a common source of human trafficking, Eastern Europe is rapidly rivalling these regions in the numbers of women and children trafficked, due to the porous borders resulting from the fall of Communism.ⁱⁱⁱ

The ICW-CIF's theme for 2003-2006 was 'Women in Development: Water, Poverty and the Girl Child'. The ICW-CIF recognises that gender equality is essentially premised on attaining the most basic human rights, and protection of the girl child is but one of the means through which child protection as a whole and gender equality can be achieved. The ICW-CIF has long recognised trafficking as a grave problem, and since its inception in 1888, trafficking has occupied a prime position on the ICW-CIF agenda. As early as the first decade of the 20th century, resolutions were adopted to curb white slavery (1904), suppress trafficking in women (1909) and protect young girls in cross-border transit (1911). Subsequently, resolutions for the protection of children during hostilities (1979). More recently in 2003 and 2006, the ICW-CIF adopted resolutions on the prevention of trafficking in women and children, and transnational organised crime.

It is telling that up until as recently as 2005, international law did not have a clear definition of what constituted 'trafficking', and it was at times confused with people smuggling.^{iv} It was only in 2000 that the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons was added to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, especially Women and Children. Article 2 of the Protocol contained a definition of 'trafficking', which detailed the abuse of power and the exploitation which lay at the root of the trade.

ICW-CIF welcomed the addition of the Protocol to the Convention, and has been doing its utmost to support the Convention and Protocol through a variety of means, namely:

- 1) educating members of the legal sector, civil society and National Councils of Women on the Convention and Protocol
- 2) monitoring the implementation of UN standards and norms

- 3) Collecting data on and analysing best practices in preventing and fighting trafficking in the girl child
- 4) Providing victims of trafficking with assistance
- 5) Taking measures to discourage factors which create an environment for the exploitation of the girl child
- 6) Monitoring the signature and ratification of the Convention and Protocol
- 7) Ensuring the effective implementation of the Convention and Protocol

While the Convention and Protocol lay out the legal framework to combat trafficking in children, it must be borne in mind that the battle against child trafficking is a complex one which must be fought on many fronts. Providing children with adequate nutrition, resources and education are but a few of the steps which need to be taken. Education of states, communities, children and families is crucial to ensure that all parties involved are aware of the challenges facing them. The consequences of child trafficking are severe and far-reaching. If a society is to be judged on the basis of the human rights enjoyed by its members, then the rights its children enjoy, which require even more vigilance, are the ultimate test of a society's soundness.

The ICW-CIF lauds the fact that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has made the theme of this 51st session 'The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child', in recognition of the fact that protecting our children is a fundamental part of the struggle for human rights. The CSW is firmly committed to the goals mapped out at the 1990 World Summit for Children and in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. In 1998, it took on wide-ranging recommendations aimed at improving the lot of the girl child. However, while recognising that the girl child is certainly in need of protection, one should also realise that raising awareness about the vulnerability of the girl child is not merely a bid to shelter her from the many evils surrounding her, but just as importantly, to educate and empower the girl child herself, so that she may hold her head high and walk forth to take her place at the forefront of society.

ⁱ 'Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation', UNICEF.

http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_exploitation.html

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Trafficking in Persons: the new Protocol', *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* The figures were revealed in a 1999 study by the International Organization for Migration.

^{iv} Susan Glazebrook, 'Looking Outwards', 8th Annual Ethel Benjamin Commemorative Address, Dunedin, 5 April 2004.